

Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd (Orbitas)
Minutes of Board Meeting,
27th July 2023 at 09.00

Present:

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| Cllr Joy Bratherton, Chair | JB |
| Cllr Mark Goldsmith, Director | MG |
| Cllr Lata Anderson, Director | LA |
| Mark Darbyshire, COO, Orbitas | MD |
| Melanie Henniker, Director HR & Corporate Services | MH |
| Cllr Michael Gorman (CEC Observer) | MiG |
| Anthony Gosling, Employee Rep North | AG |

Other Attendees:

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| Megan Bowyer, PA to MD (Minutes) | MB |
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Apologies:

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| Kevin Melling, Managing Director | KM |
| Helen Green, Finance Lead | HG |

| Agenda Item | Item Detail | Actions |
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| 01 | <p>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest JB welcomed attendees to the meeting, she advised that due notice had been given and a quorum was present. She declared the meeting open and chaired it throughout. Apologies were accepted and there were no declarations of interest.</p> | |
| 02 | <p>Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising The minutes of the meeting on 23 May 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record</p> <p>Matters Arising LS will be attending the September board meeting to update on progress re Friends Groups</p> <p>Metals Recycling donation to Papyrus to be arranged for JB and MD on Thursday 17th August to meet at Warrington Action MD</p> <p>Handyperson team – issues with capacity due to one team member being off sick so no capacity at present although new employee due to start on 14th August.</p> <p>Coppenhall Cemetery – referred back to Commissioning team but nothing further heard to date.</p> <p>Nothing further heard about closure of public conveniences but will continue to chase.</p> | MD |
| 03 | <p>Directors Q1 Strategic Report The report had been circulated previously and MD highlighted notable sections.</p> <p>MD mentioned that the amount of training in Q1 was particularly noteworthy both in terms of the volume undertaken and the variety of courses.</p> <p>There was one RIDDOR reportable accident during quarter one, but we are satisfied that the correct health and safety measures are in place.</p> | |

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| | <p>Absence data has now been provided and MD will circulate after the meeting – Action MD. Meanwhile he shared the data on screen. It comprised of a comparison of Q1 2021 to Q1 2023 – this was because data for the same period in 2022 was not considered robust. It showed that Orbitas has experienced less short-term absence this quarter. MH confirmed that the increase in long-term sickness absence in 2023 related to five people, three of whom have now returned to work. There are no particular trends and there is nothing in the statistics which gives a concern. Rolling twelve months figures will be provided in future. The Company is managing absences effectively, providing welfare as appropriate and taking employees through formal procedures when triggers are hit. Orbitas is also able to refer people with musculoskeletal problems to physio as early as possible. This allows them to get treatment quickly and definitely makes a difference aiding a speedier recovery.</p> <p>MD reported on the Handyperson activity. Any extra capacity in the team has been taken up with completion of more MA1s - 467 compared with 397 for the same period last year (which was a record number at that time). Provision of other handyperson services for private clients has therefore stalled. The demand for these services is increasing year on year. MG added that it is likely that this will continue to grow due to CEC’s policy to encourage the elderly to stay in their own homes.</p> <p>We are looking to revise the current MA1 contract’s base level and discussions are underway with Adult Services. If there are problems with that negotiation MG asked that he be advised especially as looking at the issue as a whole, the MA1 solution saves funds for the Council and NHS</p> <p>MiG commented that the last photograph in the report of wildflowers is really impressive and asked if that practice could be extended to other sites. MD confirmed that is the intention and that the team is currently looking at areas to expand in older parts of the cemeteries. MiG asked for his thanks to be passed on to the workforce. JB mentioned that the rose garden at Crewe Cemetery is a possible area for wildflower planting.</p> | MD |
| 04 | <p>Health and Safety Policy Reviews</p> <p>Three policies were brought for board review and approval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Policy – no changes • Working at Height & Young Persons Policy and Guidance Note – very small contextual change where a reference to HSE guidance has been added. <p>LA asked if we have any employees under the age of 18. MD confirmed not, although sometimes we have work experience students particularly on the admin side or grounds maintenance. MH added that any work experience requests previously have mainly been from employees’ family members.</p> <p>Board Resolution – it was resolved to authorise the policies mentioned above for a further period</p> | |
| 05 | <p>Employee Representative Matters</p> <p>AG advised that a number of staff have asked about the pay award.</p> <p>MH advised Unison didn’t get 50% response for their ballot so are unable to take industrial action on our site.</p> <p>The Unite ballot is due to end on 28th July and Unison have stated they will not respond any further until after that date. The GMB ballot is due to take place in September. This means that at the moment we are waiting for further details from the unions.</p> | |

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| <p>06</p> | <p>Grave Depths</p> <p>MD displayed a series of slides on screen. He spoke about the reasons why this subject is being discussed and explained that instances of grave collapse are low and usually minor. Risk of collapse isn't just about triple depth graves it's usually around the ground conditions. AG pointed out that the deeper the grave, the greater the risk. MD explained that the aim of the exercise was to minimise the risk of any graves collapsing whilst accepting that there will always be a small risk.</p> <p>Actions taken to date were discussed. These included considering what equipment is needed and a decision has been taken that 360-degree excavator equipment will be used across the company (180-degree is used currently in Macclesfield). This will allow for less manual digging. The plan will be to purchase two new excavators, one for Crewe and one for Macclesfield. Currently they are working on the right specification for the best available kit.</p> <p>Other improvements that were already in place are: Grave assessments – a thorough process is performed prior to digging each grave so that the best possible set of instructions are available. Sandy soil – full timber shoring will not be removed during backfill. The cost is minimal and safety will be much increased. Pigtails and butterfly joints will be introduced– this gives the ability to release gradually as opposed to using a speed brace as at present, which is all or nothing.</p> <p>JB commented that it makes us aware of how well trained our operatives have to be in order to dig a grave. She asked where new employees go to learn this skill. She also commented on a very deep grave she had seen in sandy soil at Warrington recently, which was approx. 12 feet deep and asked how this could be achieved.</p> <p>MD advised that regardless of whether new employees have previous grave digging experience they would attend courses through a training company on use of an excavator and health and safety aspects. Orbitas uses a minimum of two employees for grave digging. Until they have successfully completed training, they won't be part of the team but may go along as a supernumerary alongside others in the team.</p> <p>MD did not believe there is any reason we could not dig to triple depth – every grave needs to be risk assessed prior to digging. He was aware that graves at Warrington are pre dug by a contractor using a complex digger and then they are backfilled until needed. This makes them easier to dig.</p> | |
| <p>07</p> | <p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Wildflowers – JB mentioned that we had previously discussed the removal/lifting of the sundial structure at Crewe Cemetery and planting wildflowers. MD advised that there are a number of sets of cremated remains which have been placed in the area over time which makes it more complicated than originally thought. There is also a lot of mares' tail growing there. Action MD to explore what can be done and report back on options.</p> | <p>MD</p> |

The Meeting closed at 10.15
Next Board Meeting: 21 September 2023 at 09.00